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ABSTRACT

One approach to promote partnerships between parents and schools and parents' involvement in a child's literacy development is to instruct parents through a workshop about literacy development and how to develop a portfolio of their child's literacy development reflecting literacy behavior at home. Parents of prekindergarten students in one public school in Texas were selected by teachers to be invited to such a workshop. Participants included six parent-child dyads, two African American dyads, two Hispanic dyads, and two Anglo-American dyads. The theory of child development of A. Vygotsky and U. Bronfenbrenner's theory of human ecology were the bases for the program. Interviews with participants established the amount of parent involvement prior to the workshops. Workshops were held once a week for 8 weeks to encourage parents to be more aware of literacy development and to read to their children. Parents were involved in their children's literacy development to begin with, but their awareness was increased by attending the workshops and developing the home literacy portfolios. Findings suggest that the home literacy portfolio is also a useful took for sharing information at parent/teacher conferences. (Contains one table and nine references.) (SLD)

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Home Literacy Portfolios: Cooperative Tools for Assessing Parents' Involvement in their Prekindergarten Child's Literacy Development

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Home Literacy Portfolios: Cooperative Tools for Assessing Parents' Involvement in their Prekindergarten Child's Literacy Development

Literacy ability is vital to academic success, and parents are a critical link to their child's literacy development serving as their child's first teacher. In an effort to help parents become directly involved in their child's education, a national agenda has developed. Through Goals 2000 and the National Education Goals from the 1989 Education Summit of Governors, schools and parents are encouraged to form partnerships to increase parental involvement and participation in promoting their child's academic success. One approach for promoting both partnerships between schools and parents and for promoting parents' involvement in their child's literacy development is to instruct parents through a workshop about literacy development and about how to develop a portfolio of their child's literacy development reflecting literacy behavior observed at home. A home literacy portfolio will show progress over time and allow parents to observe their child's literacy achievements and become more aware of their child's literacy development.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was to explore and describe parents' involvement in and awareness of their prekindergarten child's literacy development and to explore the feasibility of parents using a home literacy portfolio at a parent/teacher conference to facilitate the exchange of information regarding their prekindergarten child's literacy development.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research.

1. In what ways are parents involved in the literacy development of their prekindergarten child?
2. What do parents notice about their prekindergarten child's literacy development before and after attendance at parent/child literacy workshops and before and after developing a home literacy portfolio?
3. What kinds of information are shared between parents and teachers at parent/teacher conferences in which parents use a home literacy portfolio?

Limitations

This study was limited to one public school in Texas and to the prekindergarten students who fall under the state guidelines for that program. The students and parents were not randomly chosen. As requested by the principal, three parents from each of three prekindergarten classes were selected by the classroom teachers to receive a letter to attend an orientation about a parent/child literacy workshop. Then, parents attending the orientation volunteered to participate; therefore, results can not be generalized to other populations.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's theory of child development and Bronfenbrenner's theory of human ecology serve as the theoretical bases for this study. Both stressed that interactions between people and interactions between people and their environments influence learning. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of human ecology, the interconnections between settings can be as important as what actually take place within a setting; applicatively, the relations between the school and home influence a child's learning. Bronfenbrenner

states that one way to link two settings is through intersetting communications, messages that provide specific information about the child in one setting to persons in another setting. Both Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasize the importance of social interactions for learning and for motivation to learn. The connection to this study is parental involvement in their child's literacy learning within the home environment.

Methods and Procedures

This qualitative study used Bogdan and Biklen's (1982) framework. The data were drawn from observations, interviews, and work samples. Research tools included audiotaped interviews with parents and with teachers; observations at parent/child literacy workshop sessions, which were also videotaped; and work samples, including a home literacy portfolio from each child.

The participants included six parent/child dyads--two African-American dyads, two Hispanic dyads, and two Anglo-American dyads. The children were prekindergarten students who qualified for a public school program by either meeting the requirements for free or reduced lunches or by speaking English as a second language.

There were four phases of data collection and data analysis. Each phase had a specific focus and used a particular technique. In Phase One, the focus for data collection was parents' awareness of and involvement in their child's literacy development. Each parent was interviewed using open-ended questions and the Home Literacy Environment Index (Shapiro, nd) prior to the first workshop session. The Home Literacy Environment Index was used in an interview format. France and Hager (1993) found that parents felt less

threatened by interview than by other types of assessment. All interviews were audiotape recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

For data analysis, the focus for Phase One was to analyze the parent interviews that were conducted prior to the first workshop session. The investigator was looking for patterns of parents' involvement in their child's literacy development and patterns of parents' awareness of their child's literacy development. The interviews were coded for the following: involvement, awareness, literacy activities, literacy material, open-ended activities, and activities that were drill oriented, as well as other kinds of activities.

In Phase Two, the focus was parents' involvement in their child's literacy development at home and at the parent/child workshop. The techniques for collecting data were observations at the workshop sessions, collection of the Weekly Literacy Logs, and collection of children's work samples from home. All workshop sessions were videotaped and portions of each were audiotaped. Observations focused on parent/child interactions, conversations with the researcher, sharing time, and choosing books. At each workshop during the time when parents read to their own children, one parent/child dyad was spotlighted for videotaping.

The parent/child workshop sessions were held once a week for eight weeks in the school library to educate parents about literacy development, to encourage parents to read to their children, to encourage parents to become more involved in their child's literacy learning, and to help parents become more aware of their child's literacy achievements. Each session followed the same format. First, a story was read aloud. Next, there was a brief focus on one aspect of literacy development. The literacy topics highlighted for the

eight weeks included drawing development, environmental print, reading aloud to your child, writing development, concepts of print, retelling stories, a second session about reading aloud to your child, and portfolios. A sharing time followed the focus on literacy. Then, each parent read to his/her own child. Next, parents added work samples to their child's home literacy portfolio from literacy samples collected that week at home. Last, each parent/child dyad checked out books from the library.

The focus for data analysis in Phase Two was to search for patterns of parent/child interactions, patterns in parents' questions and discussions of literacy, and patterns in the Weekly Literacy Logs. The transcribed videotapes of the workshop sessions, Weekly Literacy Logs, and field notes were analyzed for patterns and similarities. The researcher coded the notes, comparing activities and topics of conversation with the notes from Phase One, refining and extending patterns.

In Phase Three, the focus was on parents' awareness of their child's literacy development. Each parent was interviewed after completion of all workshop sessions and prior to the parent/teacher conference. At this interview, the parent shared the home literacy portfolio with the researcher by turning page by page through the portfolio. In addition to the written comments, the parents offered oral comments about the work samples. Each interview was audiotaped.

The focus for data analysis was to search for patterns of parents' awareness of their child's literacy development and also of their involvement in their child's literacy development. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded.

In Phase Four, the focus was on parents' and teachers' perceptions of the parent/teacher conferences and on the feasibility of parents using home literacy portfolios as a tool for exchanging literacy information. After completion of all parent/teacher conferences, each teacher and each parent were interviewed using open-ended questions. All interviews were audiotaped.

The focus for data analysis in Phase Four was to search for patterns in teachers' perceptions of parent/teacher conferences using the home literacy portfolio and the usefulness of the portfolio as a tool for teachers and parents to exchange literacy information about the child. Also, the information that the parents shared with the teachers was compared and contrasted with previous notes. Another focus for data analysis in Phase Four was to analyze the parent interview and to further extend and refine patterns of parents' involvement in and awareness of their child's literacy development and of the parents' awareness of their child's literacy development. In addition, parents' perceptions of the usefulness of the home literacy portfolios for sharing information with teachers and for setting goals were reviewed. Transcribed interviews with parents and transcribed interviews with teachers allowed for comparisons and support for categories.

Data Collection Chart

Table 1

Chart of Interviews and Observations

Who	What	When
Researcher	Interview parents	Prior to first workshop session
Researcher	Observe parents and children	During eight workshop sessions
Researcher	Interview parents	After completion of all workshop sessions and prior to parent/teacher conference
Researcher	Interview teachers	After parent/teacher conference
Researcher	Interview parents	After parent/teacher conference

Data analyses were ongoing and continued until the last teacher interview. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method was followed. Data from field notes, transcribed notes from the workshop sessions, transcribed notes from the interview with parents and teachers, Weekly Literacy Logs, and portfolios were analyzed for patterns and emerging categories. Focused observations followed, and the cycle of observations and data analysis was repeated. After data collection, data analysis was continued by reviewing codes, recoding, and summarizing. The information and patterns that emerged were used for developing a description of parents' involvement in and awareness of their prekindergarten child's literacy development. Also, the feasibility of parents using a home literacy portfolio for exchanging literacy information with teachers at parent/teacher conferences was explored.

Results and Conclusions

Findings indicate that parents are involved in their children's literacy development. At home, children participated in both open-ended literacy activities and drill-oriented activities, with most of the activities falling into the open-ended category. Parents were involved in these literacy activities either by actively participating or by encouraging their children's participation. All six children participated in the following open-ended activities. All were read aloud to by a parent. All drew pictures; pretended to tell stories from the pictures in books; read some environmental print; interacted with books with their parents; and attempted to write messages by scribbling. The only drill-oriented activity that all six children engaged in was writing letters of the alphabet. In addition, all children had some literacy materials at home and all parents modeled some literacy use, even if limited to writing lists and paying bills.

According to the findings, parents were more aware of their child's literacy achievements after attending the parent/child literacy workshop and developing a home literacy portfolio than before attending the workshop and developing a portfolio. The increase in the number of literacy activities that parents were aware of before attending the parent/child workshop and developing a home literacy portfolio compared with the number of literacy activities that parents were aware of after attending the parent/child workshop and developing a portfolio ranged from 6 to 16. One parent stated that the portfolios reinforced what the parent believes because the work samples show how the child is developing. For example, from the home literacy portfolio, the parent could observe and confirm that the child can write her name and that the child is adding more details to her drawings.

The findings suggest that the home literacy portfolio is a useful tool for sharing information at parent/teacher conferences. Parents stated that the portfolio helped them show the teachers their child's literacy achievements. At the conferences, the parents shared several kinds of literacy information. Each parent discussed the work samples in his or her child's portfolio and why that particular work sample was included. In the process of telling about their child's portfolio, the parents shared information about their child's drawing development, writing development, and reading development. Furthermore, the findings show that parents shared more literacy information than the teachers did at the parent/teacher conference. Although teachers shared some literacy information, most of the information offered by the teachers was about class participation or general information about the child. Nevertheless, the teachers said that the portfolios were useful tools in the conferences. One teacher suggested that the portfolio gave her a springboard for conversation with the parents. Another teacher said that the portfolios served as summative tools for language arts. From the children's drawings and lists of books read, the teacher was able to determine the units and themes in the school curriculum that attracted the children's attention.

Educational Importance

The parent/child literacy workshop appears to be a cost-effective vehicle for involving parents in their child's education. By conducting the parent/child workshop in the school library, the parents can check out books from the school. The costs include a leader, an album for the home literacy portfolio, and paper, pencils, markers, and a folder for each child.

The parent/child workshop offers parents specific ways to help their child at home and allows parents to be active participants in their child's

education. Furthermore, the workshop provides a time for parents to facilitate their child's literacy development through guided learning. For example, one father found that his daughter could read a few simple, predictable books. As he listened to her read the words, he would point to the pictures giving his daughter clues to the words that were difficult for her or that she did not have memorized.

From the parent/teacher conferences, it appears that the teachers might benefit from inservice focusing on literacy development, particularly to help them notice some of the earliest literacy achievements of children. The parents were instructed in what to be aware of in drawing development, writing development, concepts of print, environmental print, and sharing books. For example, the parents could express the ideas that pretending to read a book, knowing some books from memory, recognizing words on signs and labels, and making closed circular marks on paper were all achievements worthy of notice.

Parents and teachers might have a richer exchange of literacy information if the teachers also developed a literacy portfolio. Both parents and teachers could point out what the child does in each environment, comparing examples.

More study is needed to determine how teachers and parents can cooperatively develop literacy goals for young children. Another need is to determine what preservice inclusions would benefit teachers.

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